



The President's Daily Brief

5 February 1973

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Communist military activity in Laos has intensified amid signs that both sides are preparing for an early cease-fire. (Page 1)

In South Vietnam, fighting remained light throughout most of the country over the weekend. (Page 2)

Several major US allies are moving toward early recognition of Hanoi. In addition, some European officials are expressing uncertainty over the appropriate authorities to deal with in establishing an aid program in South Vietnam. (Page 3)

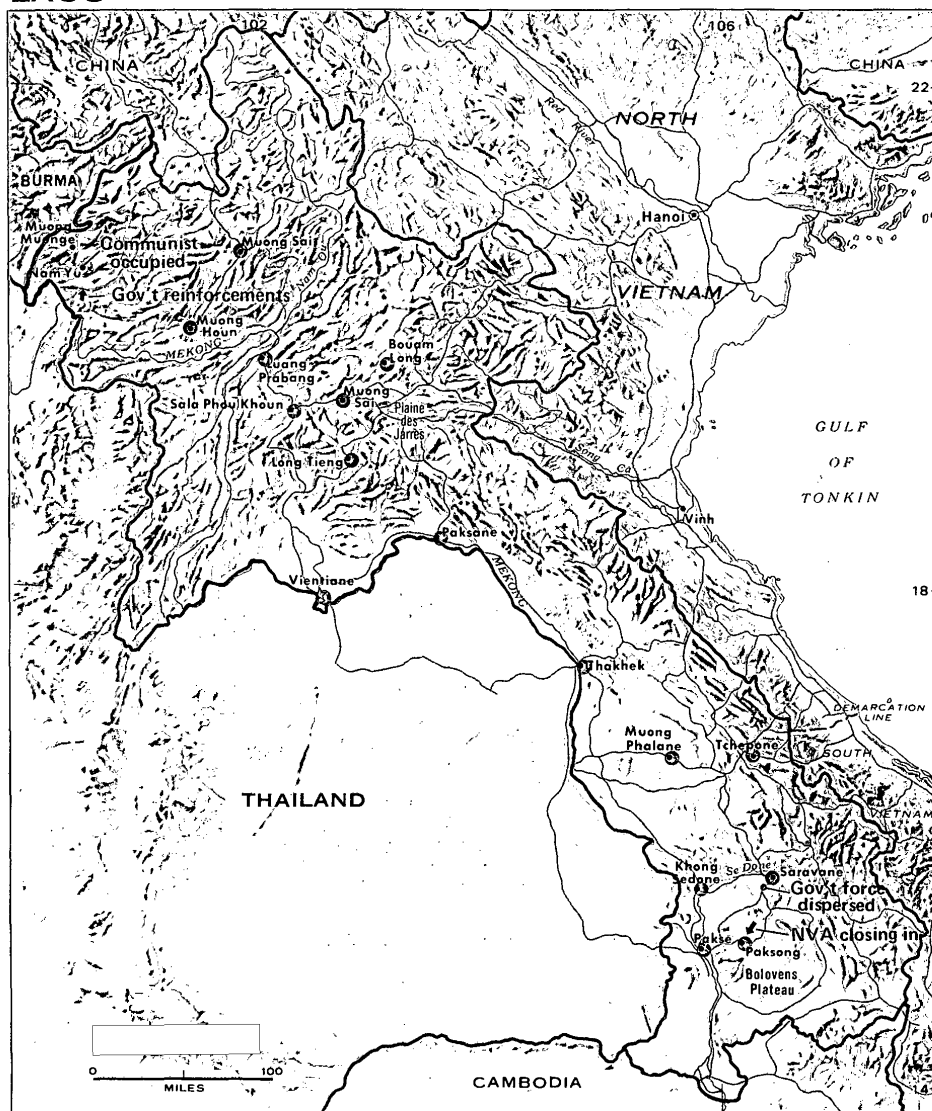
Thailand is planning to initiate contact with North Vietnam to arrange discussions on the repatriation of Vietnamese refugees. (Page 4)

On Saturday, the NATO ad hoc group adopted a proposal aimed at resolving the procedural stalemate that is blocking further sessions of the initial force reduction talks. (Page 5)

King Husayn has made clear his reservations on the usefulness of Jordan's entering a unified military command with Egypt and Syria. (Page 6)

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LAOS



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● Government controlled ● Communist controlled

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LAOS

The Communists intensified their military activity over the weekend, making the greatest headway in the remote northwest. On Saturday they overran Nam Yu, a base for government guerrilla operations, for the first time. Initial reports indicate that large numbers of irregulars in the area are moving westward and that one of two population centers still under government control is being evacuated. The government is flying reinforcements into the area, however.

In the south, Communist forces supported by tank and heavy artillery fire have overrun two government battalions southeast of Muong Phalane. Some 75 percent of both units are estimated to be killed, wounded, or missing. Farther south the North Vietnamese dispersed two irregular battalions advancing on much-contested Saravane, inflicting heavy casualties. On the Bolovens Plateau, the North Vietnamese probed government positions outside Paksong, the only population center in government hands, and a major attack could come at any time.

Peace discussions continue in Vientiane.

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Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma met with the King in Luang Prabang yesterday and is expected to confer with the senior Lao Communist representative Phoumi Vongvichit before the secret talks resume. Phoumi announced when he arrived in Vientiane over the weekend that he had come "with full powers to negotiate and conclude an agreement."

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SOUTH VIETNAM

Fighting remained light throughout most of the country over the weekend. Shelling and light ground probes continued against South Vietnamese Marine and Airborne positions in northern Quang Tri Province, but no territory changed hands. Early on Sunday, a battle was reported to be shaping up west of Hue, where a North Vietnamese unit--estimated to be a battalion supported by tanks--is moving against Fire Support Bases Veghel and Bastogne. Details are sketchy, but Communist troops appear to be in control of most of the area around Veghel and are hitting Bastogne with heavy shelling. South Vietnamese forces are counterattacking and are reported to have destroyed six tanks. Farther south, fighting continues near FSB Ross in the Que Son Valley of Quang Nam Province and along Route 1 near Sa Huynh Village in southern Quang Ngai.

On Saturday, Communist units in Binh Dinh Province captured a South Vietnamese coastal radar station southeast of the district capital of Phu My. The enemy later abandoned the station after destroying most of its equipment. Road interdictions continue to be reported along Route 14, but Highway 19 between Pleiku and An Khe has been reopened. The isolation of Kontum City is causing serious food shortages, and the rice supply is said to be virtually exhausted.

Light action was reported throughout Military Region 3 with most of the attacks occurring in Trang Bang District of Hau Nghia Province. President Thieu is reported to have ordered the military commander for the region, General Minh, to use whatever resources are necessary to drive the Communists out of areas they now hold before international control and supervisory personnel arrive and begin inspections.

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VIETNAM-RECOGNITION

Several major US allies are moving toward early recognition of Hanoi. On 1 February Ottawa informed the US that the cabinet had decided in principle to recognize North Vietnam because representation in Hanoi is needed to discuss ICCS and postwar aid matters. The following day an Italian Foreign Ministry official informed the US Embassy in Rome that the Italians had already contacted the North Vietnamese in Peking as a first step toward recognition. An Australian Foreign Ministry official recently stated that Canberra's plans for reconstruction aid would require contact in Hanoi, and that Hanoi presumably would insist on an embassy to match the Australian embassy in Saigon. The Australians plan to approach the North Vietnamese in Paris on 12 February.

In addition, some European officials have expressed uncertainty over the appropriate authorities to deal with in establishing an aid program in South Vietnam. The nine EC members are to meet later this week to consider a joint aid program for Indochina. A Belgian official has implied that the EC could decide to approach the Provisional Revolutionary Government as well as Saigon.

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THAILAND - NORTH VIETNAM

Deputy Foreign Minister Chartchai told a US Embassy official on 2 February that Bangkok intends to initiate contact with Hanoi through Red Cross channels. Bangkok hopes to arrange new discussions on the repatriation of the large number of Vietnamese refugees now residing in northeastern Thailand.

The Thai have long considered these Vietnamese, most of whom fled North Vietnam during the French-Indochina war, to be a serious internal security threat. During the last round of talks in late 1970, Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman strongly hinted that his government was interested in broader discussions aimed at reducing the apparent threat posed by the growing North Vietnamese Army presence in western Cambodia. The talks soon bogged down, however, with both sides evidently concluding that any agreement would have to await the end of the war.

Having already begun to mend their fences with Peking, the Thai could also be taking another tentative step toward a policy of rapprochement with their Communist neighbors. Bangkok recently endorsed a conference of all Southeast Asian states to discuss postwar developments and may use a new round of refugee talks to sound out Hanoi on participation in such a regional meeting.

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FORCE REDUCTION TALKS

On Saturday, the NATO ad hoc group adopted a proposal aimed at resolving the procedural stalemate that is blocking further sessions of the initial talks. The NATO group would blur some of the distinctions between observers and direct participants, but would still require that decisions be made by consensus among the direct participants. This would bring the NATO position closer to that of the Soviets, and a Soviet delegate has stated that if the West should take steps to create the "appearance of equality" of all participants, Moscow would refrain from raising extraneous issues such as neutral participation.

The Soviets have, however, introduced another complication by saying that Hungary does not wish to be a direct participant.

While most Western representatives believe this is merely a Soviet tactic, it could nevertheless cause new problems for NATO. The Benelux countries have linked their direct participation to that of Hungary, and West Germany is concerned that it could become the only NATO country on whose territory certain force controls would be applicable.

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NOTES

Jordan: In a tough speech on the eve of his departure for the US, King Husayn made clear his reservations on the usefulness of Jordan's entering a unified military command with Egypt and Syria-- a statement prompted by the Arab Defense Council's decision last week to appoint a single commander for all three "fronts." Husayn outlined three conditions for Jordan's participation: a clear understanding must be reached on the powers of the command, the Arab subsidies to Jordan must be reinstated, and the fedayeen cannot be allowed to resume operations from Jordan. He also hedged his observation that any partial or separate Middle East peace settlement would be a "fatal stab to the Arab struggle" by noting that the continuation of the present impasse is also a "deadly stab."

Chile: With the important congressional elections just four weeks away, the rival Communist and Socialist factions of the Popular Unity coalition are trying to paper over their squabble about the need for violence in achieving a socialist revolution. They are holding a mass rally tonight in an effort to demonstrate that the strains of power have not destroyed their ability to work together.

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